

State of the Town 2006
Joan A. Pagones, Supervisor

Members of the town board, department heads, staff, community volunteers, fellow elected officials, consultants, honored guests, ladies and gentlemen.

Welcome to the historic Town of Fishkill- one of the nine original Towns of Dutchess County. This marks my 15th year of service as your Town's Chief elected official. This year, I also celebrate 20 years of service in Town Government, my own personal milestone. I am privileged and honored to represent the over 20,000 individuals who call Fishkill their home.

While there remain challenges that confront us every day, our town government has turned many of these into opportunities. The honor of serving each of you is awesome, and the responsibility we share to make our community a greater place to live, work and raise a family is never ceasing. I, once again, offer my heartfelt gratitude to all of you for your continued trust and faith.

Tonight, I again speak to you about the state of our town. As we rightfully review our accomplishments during the last year, we together, look toward our 2006 agenda and the possibilities which await us. The journey we take together is exciting and we must embrace it together. Our new year will be filled with new ideas and opportunities for success.

We come together tonight, as we have for several years, a nation at war. We continue to pray for the young men and women who place their lives in harm's way under the banner of service in America's Armed Forces. Joining us this evening are several Fishkill families, whose sons have answered the very call to serve our Country:

The McArthur family has two sons, who have served us admirably as United States Marines. Andrew, a four year veteran, was stationed in Iraq and Haiti, and Ryan, for two years as a Marine Corps. Reservist. Their parents Dorothy and Keith are also here tonight and we ask them to stand.

Thank you, Andrew and Ryan for your dedicated service to our country.

Patricia and Steve Donohue are also with us tonight. They are Fishkill residents and their son Jeff is presently a 1st Lieutenant in the U.S. Army, stationed in Iraq. Jeff is a 2004 VMI graduate and has spent summers working as an Intern with our Parks Department. We thank you Patty and Steve for sharing this evening with us on behalf of Jeff. We will continue to keep him in our thoughts and prayers.

Also joining us this evening is Martin Ratigan, a Fishkill resident who recently served as a Captain in the United States Army, stationed in Korea and he is a 1999 graduate of VMI.

We are so very proud of these young men. We thank them and their families for the sacrifices they have made for all of us and for our fellow citizens.

Placing one's life on the line in the service of others is one of life's greatest sacrifices. As these men and women leave their home and families behind, they too leave behind their jobs. Sacrificing for us means taking risks beyond this selfless act. Many of our servicemen and women give up their employment, because they have no other option. Two men, Brian Kohler and Ron Stroh, employees of Fishkill's Silvestri and Sons, had an option. Their employers, Michael and Daniel Silvestri, held open their jobs so, these two could serve in Iraq as members of the National Guard Reserves. Their act of kindness and unparalleled consideration is to be applauded. They too have served their country.

Service to our nation comes in varied means, and sizes. From these men, to our youngest residents, everyone can display their own form of patriotism and concern for those in service to our country. We are so proud of a special elementary school class. Jennifer DiGregorio, a 3rd grade teacher at Brinkerhoff Elementary has

instilled in her young students a certain commitment to community service. A couple of years ago, we honored Jennifer as one of Fishkill's extraordinary citizens. Tonight we honor her third grade class.

The "Phone Home Project" raised \$550.00, all of which was donated to purchase phone cards for US troops in Iraq. The phone cards allowed the servicemen and women to call their families and friends over the holidays.

Clearly, it is never too early to begin serving your community and these kids prove that.

Also with us this evening is Antoinette Miller, a Fishkill resident whose late husband, Alfred, was awarded the Bronze Star for his heroic and meritorious achievement while engaged in an action against an enemy of the United States. Alfred Miller and Joseph Schmid of Glenham, who received his Good Conduct Medal for his service in the Army Air Corp during World War II were honored at a ceremony hosted by Congresswoman Sue Kelly. We thank the Miller and Schmid families for their service to and sacrifice for our Country.

As you can see, men and women from Fishkill and so many towns much like our own, remain a constant reminder of human-kind's most endearing sacrifice. May God continue to watch over them, protect them and give comfort to the families that love them here at home.

Last year, we spoke of the Tsunami tragedy in Southeast Asia. That horrific event was followed by our Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. We have witnessed the frailty of human life but we have seen the great nobility and decency found in every generous heart. This Christmas, our town hall family adopted a Fishkill family and also contributed to the children whose lives were devastated by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. I thank each and every staff member for your generosity and for all you do in the service to our broader community.

Our Town is well served by capable elected officials. No one person is responsible for managing local government. Teamwork, cooperation and a bold vision has helped Fishkill stand out. This formula for success rests upon the value of respect. Respect for one another as public officials, respect for our neighbors, and respect for the ideas and hopes of all who call Fishkill home.

Our Town Board members are individuals with whom I have had the joy of serving. Their individual and collective wisdom, tenacity and humility have made our town the leader it is. I congratulate Steve Ferguson and Ron Leenig on their recent re-election. Fishkill residents re-affirmed the course we have set. Thank you Steve, Ron, Dennis Zack and Heather Malvarosa for your service and commitment to all of our residents **(Please Stand)**

Town Clerk Darlene Bellis, Highway Superintendent Glenn Scofield, Town Justices Frank Cross and Harold Epstein work closely with our Town Board, and we thank you for your unselfish service.

Also with us tonight are current and former officials:

Dutchess Co. Surrogate & NYS Supreme Court Judge James Pagones

Supervisor Joe Ruggiero

Village of Fishkill Trustee Peter Philips

Former East Fishkill Supervisor Pete Idema

East Fishkill Supervisor John Hickman

Former Town of Poughkeepsie Supervisor Joe Davis

County Legislator and Mayor, Marcus Molinaro

Our town department heads and their staff deserve a special "Thank You" as well: Bill Ratigan, Paula Sarvis, Chris Colsey, Jim Foy, Cindy Starke, Susan McGuire, Bob Wheeling, Chief Donald Williams and Paul Gromkowski – you put into practice the policies of this administration and work everyday, hand-in-hand with the residents of our great community.

We rely on the expert assistance of many consultants as well: John Andrews, Scott Volkman, Ron Blass, Sedore & Co, CAMO, Morris Associates, Greenplan, Community Network, Duality, Christine Chale, and Leggette, Brashears & Graham – we thank you!

The truth remains, that all our effort would be for naught, were it not for the hard work of our citizen volunteer boards and committees: Planning, Zoning, Assessment, Environmental Board and our Comprehensive Plan Committee – we thank you for your devotion to our Town. Your work shapes the very character of our community.

If you would all please stand. This community is grateful for your service.

Tonight we also congratulate the Village of Fishkill for their Dutchess County Planning Federation Award for improvements made to the Village's streetscape. Anyone who has traveled through our beautiful village can see the progress that has been made under the stewardship of Mayor Jim Miccio and his Board of Trustees. Tonight, as the Mayor receives his award, we are joined by Trustee Peter Phillips. Pete, welcome and congratulations. (Please come forward) Councilwoman Heather Malvarosa, our Village Liaison, will present the Village our congratulations for a job well done.

Each year at this time I have endeavored to single out individuals who are true local heroes. Each living in our midst, with ties to the Fishkill community, thinking they are just ordinary people. They are so very wrong... they are so much more.

Those we recognize tonight join the many "Special People" whose work we have celebrated over the years. They serve as models for us all.

Carolyn Cardoni resides in Beacon Hills. She is a stay-at-home mom and an avid crocheter. I became aware of Carolyn when I was speaking with another town resident whose son was in pre-school years ago with our daughter Julia.

Carolyn then came into talk with me about the work she is doing with cancer victims. Carolyn and friends crochet shawls and bring them to cancer centers for trauma patients undergoing chemotherapy treatments. Carolyn receives no compensation other than the satisfaction she receives from the loving responses of the patients she helps. To quote Carolyn: "when you give the patient this gift, one is speechless and doesn't know what to say or do. They just cry and we cry with them. Their faces are priceless. What a feeling you get." Having been touched by a cancer diagnosis in her own family, Carolyn has made a difference in the lives of many cancer patients.

Carolyn, we thank you for your extraordinary spirit. We are proud to have you as a Fishkill neighbor.

Camile Price (Paternoster) is certainly not a stranger to any of us here in the Town of Fishkill. Camile recently retired from public service as one of our County Legislators. Camile has served in local government since 1970. Thirty-five years is a long time – serving as Bookkeeper, Budget Director, Deputy Supervisor to then-Supervisor Muller, and County Legislator, always with humility and a keen knowledge of Fishkill's needs. Camile has always been there for us. Now, Camile will have some free time to devote to Bob and her family, church and personal interests.

Camile, we thank you and we wish you well. You are truly extraordinary.

Two years ago, our town embarked upon an effort to provide affordable housing to individuals of all income levels throughout Fishkill. We appointed Paul Gromkowski our Housing Director and he has hit the ground running. We established a Department of Housing which is being funded by the creation of a Housing Trust Fund paid for by developers. In this way, development works and pays for us!

To date 171 affordable housing units have been created. Senior Horizons will open this spring and will provide 90 affordable apartments to those 55 years and older. Larry Regan and Bryce White: we say thank you for partnering with us.

Aveonis is under construction right now and will have 19 Affordable Senior Condominiums. Thank you, Nick Dellaportis, for your partnership.

The Crest will see two luxury affordable town homes and Toll Brothers Project at Westage, twenty affordable senior units. Thank you Tom Perna and Toll Brothers.

The Town of Fishkill was honored by the Dutchess County Economic Development Corporation this past fall for our Workforce Housing initiatives.

We answered the calls of our “fellow residents.” We created affordable housing for them. Only communities, in partnership with the private sector can generate housing options. Only communities can implement zoning changes. No higher level of government or special program can dictate to towns, villages and cities. Where others have failed to create affordable housing, this town has faced the challenge head-on and we have delivered!!

Government and the private sector can work together to forge partnerships that will serve our constituents. In 2006 our housing goals include:

1. Mandatory affordable housing set-asides for all new developments greater than 10 Living Units
2. Funding for emergency housing repairs
3. A 1st time home-buyers, and energy conservation seminars.
4. Single family stand alone workforce residences, and
5. Work with our State representatives to create an environment for mandated workforce housing.

This past year the Town Board approved a request to purchase 100% of our electric needs through wind power. We have set an example for other communities, while also embarking upon a solar energy project at Shephard Park. It is our intention to use solar energy panels at other sites throughout our town campus, while also making use of cleaner technologies. All mean to conserve our precious natural resources.

2006 will see a new Recreation and Senior Citizen Building on our town campus. We are also negotiating with the Dutchess County Girl Scout Council to acquire Camp Foster on the 9D Corridor to further expand our Park System.

Another major addition to our park system and measure of open space protection will be our acquisition of the 93 open acres now a part of the former Texaco property. Let me say that again: our acquisition of the 93 open acres now a part of the Texaco property. To be clear, I say this to my friends throughout Fishkill, but especially within the historic hamlet of Glenham: This Town will make use of every tool and resource at our disposal to protect these open lands and ensure they remain forever green. And to my colleagues in Town government, I mean every tool at our disposal.

Preserving this land is important, planning for the future of the rest of the former Texaco site is our next priority. Fishkill’s Comprehensive Plan Committee will seek the services of a special planning consultant to develop options for how the existing plant can be used. No application for re-zoning will be entertained by this Town Board until the study is completed. As we proceed with this sensitive property, we will abide by one simple rule: PLAN NOW OR BE SPRAWLED LATER. We choose to plan ahead.

In other park news, we are happy that the Little League concession stand at Shephard Park is now complete. Sewer and water service, a new pavilion and playground equipment will also be ready for the 2006 Season.

I would like to thank Bill Ratigan and his staff for their hard work in completing these projects, and the residents of Glenham for remaining focused on an important measure meant to protect their own quality of life. We stand ready to assist you!

The practice of good stewardship extends to our fiscal management. The year 2006 marks the 9th consecutive year of decreases in the town's property tax rate. The careful scrutiny of each line item, our ability to successfully secure grant funding, the strong leadership of department heads and board members, and the sound management of your tax dollars are all part of our own "good government."

The fall of 2006 will see the construction and completion of the 9D water pipeline for those areas that have been plagued by bad wells. This pipeline will be complete by year's end and is made possible by a \$400,000.00 grant from the Governor's Office of Small Cities. The Town will solicit Bids shortly and the project will have a year end completion date.

In Addition, plans for a new waste-water treatment plant in the Rombout Sewer District will begin soon. This facility will replace the existing plant, which the Town acquired several years ago. In the late 1990's, when the Town was solicited by our Route 9D residents to provide them public water and sewer, we answered the call, met with the Public Service Commission and purchased the utilities from a private company. Since then, we have completed a connector line to the City of Beacon for water. Now, it is time to upgrade sewer services. As we move forward on this major initiative, we will seek to identify and secure affordable financing, private sector commitment and any government grants that can be applied to the project. We remain committed to building the partnerships necessary to complete this and projects like it. This includes our partnership with our Skilled Labor Forces through a Project Labor Agreement.

2005 saw the retirement of James Wick as our Planning Board Chairman. Jim served the town well and has re-located to Pennsylvania. Tom Knips has taken the helm as Chair, as our Planning Board continues to serve our community in an exemplary manner. The Town issued 745 Building Permits in 2005, and conducted 606 municipal searches. And we have handled 22 new planning applications. These numbers graphically display the growth we have experienced. While some communities struggle with and fear growth, our town manages it smartly.

We are pleased that Home Depot will open in the spring of this year. We expect the Dutchess Mall property to continue its renaissance, while increasing its assessed value lost for so many years.

We were overjoyed to have Governor Pataki come to Fishkill to announce the conveyance of over 200 acres at Baxtertown Road to Stonykill Farm. We continue to work with Supervisor Joe Ruggiero and the Wappinger Town Board to secure funding to save the Hobbit Farm. We were pleased to broker the agreement with Toll Brothers and the Wappinger Central School District to have 32 acres made available for a school. And we look forward to the completion and approval of our Comprehensive Plan this year.

All of these initiatives point to the balanced, even-handed approach your town government continues to employ. We can protect our environment while fostering economic development. We know this, because we've done this!

With us tonight is someone we've had the opportunity to work with on a regional basis – Mike DiTullo, President & CEO of Mid Hudson Patterns for Progress embodies the very message of smart growth and regionalism we embrace. Mike has brought together the counties of Orange, Ulster & Dutchess in a regional alliance. As President of Dutchess County Supervisors and Mayors Association I have seen first hand the benefits of such an alliance. Thank you, Mike for your leadership and service to all the counties of our region.

Providing for the public safety is the most important function of any government. In addition to our 24/7 Police Department, our Fire Companies, who serve us on a volunteer basis, and our ambulance services, some of which are volunteer, remain valuable components of our public safety umbrella.

For the past year, I have met with all of our fire districts and Councilman Steve Ferguson to begin the process of constructing an Emergency Fire Training Center in the Town of Fishkill. Currently, the Districts have formed a sub-committee which will report back to the Town the specifics of the project. We, as a Town, will then select the site most suitable for this important community resource. We continue to support our volunteer firefighters and will look for new and innovative ways to attract new volunteers to the ranks, while supporting the needs of those current volunteers.

Tonight, I announce a new public safety initiative. A committee of one, Councilman Dennis Zack, will serve as the Liaison for Public Safety. Councilman Zack's duties will include a review of police, ambulance and firematic policies, regulations and procedures. Our goal is simple: streamline government and make it work better for all of us. A liaison's office will be established in our Law Enforcement Building, and Councilman Zack will report back to the full town board periodically with his recommendations and findings. In the shadow of last week's incident in Ulster County, the importance of an organized and efficient coordinated response, is so vivid and unquestionably understated.

Following Councilman Zack's Final report, we will appoint other committees to review all government departments to develop necessary improvements and efficiencies. As we continue to grow as a town, we must look for ways to improve and streamline our provision of services.

Our own public safety is enhanced by a Disaster Preparedness Plan. The Town of Fishkill has an official plan in place to act when disaster strikes. We have upgraded the plan each year and will continue to do so. Mark Breimer serves as Chair of the committee and Nancy Lecker as Secretary.

In conjunction with our Disaster Committee, the Town, under the leadership of Councilwoman Heather Malvarosa, has spearheaded our Animal Disaster Planning Committee. The committee has met on a regular schedule to research, define and plan for the animals in our pilot areas of Fishkill, Beacon and Wappinger. The Town Board adopted our Annex and Memorandum of Understanding to the Fishkill Emergency Management Disaster Plan. Education and training, including mock drills, are important for our citizens and we will continue to outreach to our community at large.

Plans for a Veterans Memorial Park with a War Dog Memorial are underway. The site will be located on the newly acquired property next to our Police and Recreation facilities. Councilmen Ferguson and Leenig are co-chairing the Veterans portion. Councilwoman Malvarosa will chair the War Dog Memorial portion. We are projecting a Spring groundbreaking.

This Town was one of the first to implement "On the Road" Town Board Meetings during the summer months, a practice that continues today. As television's hyperactive chef Emeril frequently remarks: "Let's kick it up a notch." Beginning in May and ending in October, this Board will be on the road for every other meeting. The busy schedules of our constituents are duly noted and we will meet in every hamlet and neighborhood of this Town. From Dutchess Junction to Glenham, and Dutchess Park to Van Wyck Glenn we will bring your government to you. We will also coordinate with our village officials to hold a joint Village/Town meeting sometime this year. We may even schedule a Saturday morning session, coffee and orange juice on me! We can never do enough to ensure transparency and accessibility to this government of, by and for the people.

For those of you who may not be aware, East Fishkill and Fishkill have had an inter-municipal relationship to monitor a closed landfill for many years. This year, a new technology will seek to employ an energy saving,

environmentally friendly system to dispose of leachate. I thank former East Fishkill Supervisor Pete Idema and newly elected Supervisor John Hickman for their cooperation and leadership in this joint venture.

The joint reassessment of southern Dutchess County communities continues forward under the direction of our local assessors. As we move through 2006, educational sessions are being planned for residents to help explain exactly what the reassessment will mean to you, our town taxpayers.

The primary goal of reassessment is not to raise one single dollar more of taxes, but to restore fairness and equity to all property owners. Town of Fishkill property owners will be better able to understand and evaluate their assessments and tax bills by attending these educational sessions.

Assessments will be updated on a regular basis to maintain full market value. The Town of Fishkill's last reassessment was completed in 1987. Like our partner communities in the Southern Dutchess Reassessment Consortium, the Town of Fishkill has been experiencing sharp increases in real estate values since 2001. This in turn has caused our local equalization rates to plummet, major tax discrepancies to occur between municipalities, inequities in local assessment rolls and an unfair distribution of the Dutchess County tax burden.

Town budgets, however, are not a function of assessments. A town government establishes its needs in a town budget and establishes a town tax rate. Therefore, when a residence or a commercial business is valued, the town tax rate is applied to their assessment and a tax bill is generated.

If a municipality increases its town budget, the tax rate will increase and residents will see an increase in taxes. If property values are all at a uniform percent of value, ideally 100%, residents may or may not see an increase in their individual tax bill. If the overall assessed value of the Town of Fishkill rises, the overall tax rate will decrease accordingly.

In some municipalities where reassessments have been completed, taxes have gone down the first year after the reassessment. If the municipality decides in ensuing years to raise their town budget for various reasons, property owners will see an increase in local taxes; this however, is not due to the reassessment program.

I believe that our record of nine straight years of town tax decreases speaks for itself. All of us in Fishkill should be assessed fairly and uniformly, nothing more, nothing less.

The Town of Fishkill also continues forward in partnership with the Town of Wappinger, Supervisor Joseph Ruggiero and his Town Board to prepare for shared assessor services forming a coordinated assessor program. Our joint plan is to implement this program in the 2007 budget. We, in the Town of Fishkill, value our relationship with the Town of Wappinger and are pleased to implement cost saving solutions to local challenges. Each meant to save tax dollars while increasing productivity. Thank you Supervisor Ruggiero.

Public Service remains my chosen profession. The ability to make a difference in the lives of the people of our community remains a great honor and privilege. My husband, Jim, understands the demands of public life and the amount of time that is required to truly perform the duties of elective office.

As many of you know, Jim is our County's Surrogate and an Acting Justice of the Supreme Court. I thank you Jim and our family for your love, support and unselfishness as I continue in public service.

Tonight, I also, thank my Town Hall family: Pam Garnot, my Assistant, Joanne Shebanie our Legislative Aide, Mayor Marc Molinaro, my good friend, Cindy Starke and Bill Ratigan and their staff for the preparation of this event.

Scripture tells us that "By our words we will be affirmed..."

May we always keep unto each other a spirit of respect and decency. May God's glory be upon all those who sacrifice in service to us. May His grace shower those who live with loss, and may He continue to bless our community and the United States of America.